



## NATIONAL EDUCATION GOALS PANEL

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### ***National Education Goals Panel Releases Policies and Practices that States Can Use to Improve Reading***

#### **Case Study of Reading Achievement in Connecticut Offers Model for Success**

NEW BRITAIN, CT (October 26, 1999) – The National Education Goals Panel released a case study today detailing successful state, district and classroom practices in place in Connecticut that have increased reading achievement. The study, titled *Exploring High and Improving Reading Achievement in Connecticut*, explores why the state had the highest reading achievement scores on the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) exam and is the most-improved state in reading scores since 1992. In addition, the study examines why white, black and Hispanic students in Connecticut all performed better than their counterparts in other states.

“This analysis is one of the first to attempt to identify, on a state-wide basis, linkages between progress in reading achievement and types of instructional approaches in those districts making the greatest progress,” said G. Reid Lyon, Ph.D., of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, National Institutes of Health, who commented upon the case study for the Goals Panel. “A substantial achievement of this analysis is the use of a well thought out methodology to disentangle policy effects from the economic, race/ethnicity, and parental education factors that can influence reading achievement.”

The Goals Panel commissioned the study to look for lessons of public policy that might be applicable to other states. The case study, which was written by Joan Boykoff Baron, used state test data to identify the 10 medium and large school districts in the state that made the most improvement in reading achievement. The findings of the case study are based on extensive interviews with teachers, administrators and state education and government officials. The case study also examines NAEP data

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and the results of the Connecticut Mastery Test, an annual state test of reading and math skills. This case study is the first comprehensive study of its kind that has linked state test results to classroom practices. It is also unique in that it documents student reading improvements across a broad socio-economic range of students.

The National Education Goals Panel selected Connecticut because the state ranked first in performance and simultaneously first in improvement in the 1998 NAEP 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading assessment. Although its top performance may be linked to the state's affluence, its continued improvement in reading achievement could not be linked to income. Between 1990 and 1995 Connecticut's median household income actually declined both in absolute terms and relative to the other states. Because the state's success could not be attributed solely to its economic well-being, the Goals Panel commissioned a study to determine what state policies were in place that could be linked to Connecticut's reading successes.

"One of the reasons we decided to do a case study on Connecticut is that the 10 districts with the greatest improvement in reading scores represent a wide socioeconomic range, a broad geographic distribution and socioeconomic and demographic stability," said Gov. Paul E. Patton, KY, chair of the National Education Goals Panel. "The success of these districts, collectively, proves that improvement in reading achievement is possible in virtually every state and in every socio-economic group."

The study identified several district and school-level practices associated with the state's reading accomplishments. Collectively, educators interviewed in each of the 10 successful districts credited their improvement on the creation of strong local ownership and accountability for student reading growth; the linkage of teacher evaluations to student achievement; extensive professional development opportunities in skills needed to improve students' reading; and continuously monitoring student achievement. Dr. Baron also notes a possible link in reading achievement to the state's high pre-school participation.

The case study documents a number of classroom-level policies and practices that were used regularly among high-performing districts. Those classroom practices were a strong emphasis on phonemic awareness in kindergarten and first grade, the use of a variety of instructional materials to

meet a variety of classroom instructional needs, a balanced reading program emphasizing both word analysis skills and comprehension strategies, and the constant reinforcement of reading skills through daily writing exercises. The study also noted the value of using systematic spelling programs to reinforce both reading and writing, the use of on-going assessments of reading ability, the early identification of children with delayed reading development and the use of a variety of intervention strategies and experts to assist delayed readers.

The case study identified six state policies and practices that were identified by Connecticut's 10 top performing districts as contributing most to local progress:

- The use of a state reading test with results that are broadly publicized;
- Test results that are reported in ways that are user friendly for local administrators, teachers and parents and that allow special analyses at the local level;
- The development of reading tests for grades 3, 5 and 7 that are aligned with the state test to supplement the tests given at grades 4, 6 and 8;
- Annual release of school profiles to local boards of education and the public;
- State-level allocation of additional resources to the neediest districts; and,
- High pay and standards for teachers that allow local districts to recruit and retain high quality teachers.

Surprisingly, the case study examined average class size in Connecticut and found it to not be a factor linked to the state's reading achievements. Connecticut ranks only 13<sup>th</sup> among states in having small class sizes and class sizes have remained relatively stable during the 1990s. There was also no link identified between the length of the instructional day and students' reading levels. Thirty-two states have longer instructional days, yet their students did not perform as well, nor did they improve as much as Connecticut students did.

The case study is part of a series of "Lessons from the States" case studies that the National Education Goals Panel commissions to investigate successful policy practices that can be linked to improvements in academic performance. The Goals Panel makes this information available as a resource to local, state and national education policy makers so successful practices and policies may be replicated, allowing America to move ever closer to the National Education Goals.

To download a copy of *Exploring High and Improving Reading Achievement in Connecticut*, by Joan Boykoff Baron, please visit the National Education Goals Panel web site, [www.negp.gov](http://www.negp.gov). Questions for the author may be sent to [joanbaron@aol.com](mailto:joanbaron@aol.com).

*About the National Education Goals Panel*

Created in July 1990, the National Education Goals Panel is a bipartisan body of federal and state officials made up of eight governors, four members of Congress, four state legislators and two members appointed by the President.

The eight National Education Goals call for greater levels of: student achievement and citizenship; high school completion; teacher education and professional development; parental participation in the schools; literacy and lifelong learning; and safe, disciplined, and alcohol-and-drug-free schools. The Goals also call for all children to be ready to learn by the time they start school and for US students to be first in the world in mathematics and science achievement by the year 2000.

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